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Report to Parish Councils – June 2026

This report is written is for Parish Councils meeting in June.

Some of the items here are from information circulated by ESCC but which may not have been drawn to the attention of parish councillors and others.

I did not write a report last month due to the election.

My Activities

Due to the election there were few formal council meetings, but I list those since the start of April:

- I attended a meeting of the carbon reduction reference group, a sub-panel; of Place Scrutiny, looking at the current plans for ESCC to be carbon neutral by 2050 and progress made. This looks to be a very challenging target. The council has no money to spend on this except that from government grants which are earmarked for this
- I chaired a meeting of the Exceat bridge working group which is set up by Place scrutiny to monitor the progress of this major project.
- I attended a meeting of the Scrutiny and Audit panel of the Fire Authority and chaired a meeting of the Policy and Resources panel. The latter particularly looks at finance.
- I attended my first meeting of the Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority to which I have just been appointed. This is responsible for fisheries out to 6 miles and is funded by East and West Sussex councils.
- I attended a meeting of the Discretionary Transport Appeal Panel which considers appeals from parents or carers denied travel assistance to schools.

My committee memberships will be changing after the election.

ESCC Post Election

I have had many questions about the situation at the County Council since the election. Normally I steer clear of political issues in my reports, but here I need to stray from this though I hope in an objective way.

The results of the election in seat terms were:

- Reform 22 councillors
- Liberal Democrats 13 councillors
- Green 11 councillors
- Conservative 3 councillors
- Independent 1 councillor

This means there is no overall control. I was one of the few Conservative councillors re-elected and thank the residents of Northern Rother. I pledge myself to continue to serve all residents. This may only be for a year as the government intends that unitary elections are to be held in May 2027, though it is possible that this will change.

After the election I was elected group leader of the Conservatives and immediately was engaged with the group leaders from the other three parties to see if an alliance or agreement was possible, the two obvious ones being a Reform/Conservative agreement and a LibDem/Green/Conservative agreement. With my two colleagues we decided as a group that neither of these would work as we have too many policy differences.

We therefore decided to have no deal with anyone and will be 'constructive opposition'. However, the county needs an executive and given that Reform is by far the largest group we gave our support at the crucial initial full council meeting on 21st May to a Reform leader and a Reform chairman. The latter is important as the numbers mean that hung votes could occur when the chairman has a casting vote. The alternative of an Liberal Democrat chairman would probably result in a paralysed council.

As Conservatives we will certainly not be supporting Reform on a general basis and will vote on each issue on a case-by-case basis, on what we think are in the interests of the residents of East Sussex. We will also be working behind the scenes to help ensure sensible policies.

I set out details of our full position at the full council meeting on the 21st which is available on webcast. Crucially we will hold Reform to account. We believe that many of their policies in their manifesto were not researched and they will find them not to be feasible.

Newenden Bridge

As a reminder, Kent County Council have announced that the 4-month closure for major structural repairs will be from June to September in 2027.

As previously reported I have been working with two aims:

- To reduce the 4 month closure time. I've had a helpful response from KCC saying that 24/7 working is not possible for safety reasons as the guidelines mean that staff cannot work over water at night. However they are looking at whether extended hours working is possible.
- To get an application to central government for a grant to fund a new two-lane bridge in parallel to the existing one. This is 'strategic' (i.e. would take some years). After the election I made contact with the Cllr Griffiths who is the new Lead Member for Transport

and Environment. He and I are meeting to discuss this application and he will also be raising this in a meeting with KCC.

Grants for Parishes

This section will occur each month and is a list of possible sources of funding for parish level projects. I have had a number of enquiries as to whether any of these could help with areas such as allotments. Sadly the answer is no – these are all intended for community/parish council projects. However I am asking this again as policies sometimes change.

- Dungeness Power Stations. I sit on the Site Stakeholder Group which liaises between the massive project to decommission these and the local community. They often provide grants for local activities including some in East Sussex even though the power stations are in Kent. For example, this Christmas Rye food bank is their designated charity. The criteria for this used to be with 15 miles of Dungeness but this has been increased to 20 miles. Contact me for details.
- Veolia Green and Food Waste Composting Facility. As a member of Place Scrutiny I have visited this site near Lewes. Their 'output' is compost and they deliver 'one tonne bags' at no cost to local community gardens and similar. I put Peasmarsh parish council in contact with them and they have already received two bags for the community gardens.
- Southeast Water do make grants to local communities, for example to support playgrounds
- Gatwick Airport are keen on funding local projects, at least partly driven by their desire to open a second runway which would have some impact on East Sussex, though less in the Eastern part

If you have a project which might benefit, please let me know and I will put you in contact and try to help get it approved. It seems that the best will be for those seeking funds to send me an email which I will then forward.